

## ARTICLES

### What's It All About?

By Donna Kaner Socol – December 7, 2021

“What’s it all about, Alfie?” We awaken in the morning and sometimes ask ourselves this question. We are women who chose our quest to be advocates and trial lawyers. We want to pursue our aspiration and dreams. We want to excel in our profession. However, there can be impediments along the way. So how do we conquer these impediments?

My fascination with the song “[Alfie](#)” began many years ago. Not just because of Dionne Warwick or the music, but because of the message. Here are excerpts, with my acknowledgement and many thanks to the composer and lyricist of “Alfie,” Burt Bachrach and Hal David:

What’s it all about, Alfie?  
Is it just for the moment we live? . . .  
Are we meant to take more than we give? . . .  
And if life belongs only to the strong, Alfie, . . .  
Then I guess it is wise to be cruel.

The answer is a resounding no!

In other words, empathy, compassion, and an understanding of humanity are the characteristics we should strive for and are the keys to success in any endeavor. We can create our image and persona, and our exterior may be acknowledged by others—that we look impressive and act accordingly. But what is truly impressive and most important to clients is who we are, our warmth, and an understanding of our cases and of others.

To the extent I am successful, I attribute my success to my hard work and personality. I am, at my core, a shy person. So why am I a trial lawyer? I am happy to sit back and be the perfect voyeur. However, at a point in our psyche, we develop the skills to excel. No matter what your goals, you must have the inner dynamic and “fire” to make you the best you can be—the best trial lawyer, mediator, arbitrator, judge, or whatever you decide to be.

Here are eight things I have learned along the way:

#### **Do Not Deceive Yourself**

Be honest with yourself. If you decide you no longer love what you do and may not even like it, find another aspect of law that you love. Your work will not get better once you decide you do not like what you are doing. Change is good at times. It makes us stronger and gives us an understanding of ourselves.

#### **Mentorship Is Important**

Strong women assist us in becoming stronger. What is it about this person that you admire? You may not like all of her attributes, so select the ones you do and adopt them.

### **Honesty Is the Best Policy**

Clients are our sustenance. But, if you feel your client is not supportive or someone you do not care to work with, find other clients. There is nothing worse professionally than feeling unsupported or betrayed.

### **Follow Your Instincts**

This has been particularly helpful to me. When I was starting out as a young lawyer and about to start a lengthy trial, I asked a senior partner for a few tips. His advice was to do what you do naturally, follow your intuition and instincts, and the jury will see you are devoted to your case and the truth. You have passion!

One of the most interesting lessons from his advice was in a case in which I discovered as a defense attorney that the plaintiff who contended he was blind was not. Oddly, my instincts told me to investigate this case after the plaintiff's deposition. His mannerisms made me doubtful of his blindness. So I retained a prominent neuro-ophthalmologist to perform a non-invasive exam of the plaintiff's optic nerves. After extensive argument, the judge approved the proposed examination. The examination revealed that the plaintiff's optic nerves were normal. After a few years of discovery, I uncovered that his allegations were fraudulent. I will always be grateful to my private investigators who continued their pursuit of his actions, which revealed him shopping, going to a bar and serving beer to patrons, and running across a busy highway to catch a train. My client avoided a needless trial and was appreciative of my ingenuity and the persistence of my convictions. Many cases followed.

### **Preparation Is Key**

I have always worked harder and researched and learned the facts and nuances of my cases so that when I have an expert, I know the medicine (my cases) almost as well as the experts do. Becoming this knowledgeable involves research, obtaining your own experts who are knowledgeable about the topic, and discussing the issues with them until you feel there are no more questions to ask. Remember this caveat: There are always more questions.

### **Clients Appreciate Communication**

Of course, clients appreciate creativity, ingenuity, thinking outside the box, and us being there for them. However, they also appreciate responsiveness and availability even in the evening and on weekends. Because I deal with many physicians, I tell them, "I am on call for you." We have a symbiotic relationship, a mutual understanding, and a common goal: to achieve a successful resolution of a case.

Client entertainment has always been important, but friendship is better. Even during the pandemic, we must be creative. Outdoor activities, Zoom meetings with music, and sharing favorite movies, authors, or experiences are necessary. Social media are also important because they allow for an exchange of ideas and interactive conversations.

### **Beware of the Queen Bee Syndrome**

## American Bar Association, Section of Litigation The Woman Advocate

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Psychologists in the 1970s defined queen bee syndrome as “[a woman in a position of authority in a male-dominated environment who treats subordinates more critically if they are female.](#)” I have observed women with this mind-set throughout my career, and the queen bee syndrome could be its own article. I invite you to Google the topic and be wary.

### **Be Yourself**

The key to success is to be yourself! Be true to yourself, your goals, and your aspirations, and do not be afraid to voice them. Be objective and nonjudgmental. You will make new friends and gain new insights. To the extent you enjoy being an educator, lecturer, writer, or athlete, engage in these activities and share your interests. Let others know who you are. Being a genuine person is the key to success. Nothing replaces warmth, passion, and an understanding of others. And, of course, nothing replaces hard work.

The pandemic has taken its toll in many ways. It created isolation and depression. So I also have to comment on the song made famous by Barbra Streisand, “[People.](#)” The lyrics of this song are correct: “People who need people are the luckiest people in the world.” In the world of being a female trial lawyer, let’s do what we do best: be ourselves, a picture of warmth and humanity.

So, in reflecting on “What’s it all about, Alfie,” I am fortunate to have a reminder every day. My puppy, Alfie, reminds me of who I am and what it means to be compassionate and truly successful.

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